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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 14th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KHAN (Pakistan)

later: Mr. RAICHEV (Bulgaria)
(Vice-Chairman)

later: Mr. KHAN (Pakistan)
(Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 89: ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/49/204-E/1994/90, A/49/205-E/1994/91, A/49/223-E/1994/105, A/49/229, A/49/256, A/49/287-S/1994/894, A/49/307-S/1994/958, A/49/381, A/49/462 and Corr.1, A/49/479)

- (a) IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/49/463)
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1. Mr. FRASER (Canada) said that, while much remained to be done to reach the goals set at Rio, the world community could point with some pride to the progress achieved in the two years since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. For Canada, one of the most significant of the issues yet to be resolved was the fishery crisis in the North West Atlantic. Steps had been taken to reduce catches of endangered stocks in that region. The United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks had made significant progress in developing an effective regime for high seas fisheries containing effective conservation and management measures and buttressed by appropriate surveillance and control and a binding mechanism for settlement of disputes.

2. The number of environmental issues on which the international community had made a clear commitment to action was growing, as demonstrated by the entry into force of the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the signing of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. Canada also welcomed the successful conclusion of the negotiations on the Global Environment Facility and the outcome of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The Programme of Action adopted at that Conference represented a step forward in efforts to meet the needs of a group of countries that faced difficult environmental and development challenges.

3. The 1994 session of the Commission on Sustainable Development had offered the first opportunity to review the implementation of Agenda 21. It had highlighted the Commission's value and the steps that could be taken to make it even more effective, for example, promoting true exchanges of views among Ministers at the high-level meeting and encouraging the participation of Ministers of development and planning as well as those representing the sectors under discussion.

4. Canada had submitted its national report outlining the progress it had made in meeting the goals of Agenda 21. National reports represented storehouses of information and experience from which all could benefit, and greater opportunities should be created for their discussion. Internationally accepted indicators of sustainable development were essential to gauging progress and creating a benchmark for discussing future options. Inter-sessional meetings of the Commission involving international institutions, non-governmental and other organizations had been very useful in advancing the dialogue and preparing for the annual sessions. Meetings such as the one Canada had just hosted on forests and another planned for 1995 on toxic substances, were a valuable tool. A commitment to action at the national and community levels, as well as at the global level, was required in order to turn Agenda 21 into a reality. Much of Canada's progress had come because it had set goals, standards and measures providing a clear target to be achieved, and the world community deserved no less.

5. Mr. McKINNON (New Zealand) said that his delegation was generally encouraged by the progress achieved in implementing the results of the Rio Conference. The continuing interest of the international community in that area was evident from the attention paid to the annual session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In the view of his delegation, the Commission's two main functions were to provide an overview of information supplied by Governments, institutions, and non-governmental organizations on the implementation of Agenda 21, and to facilitate international agreement on policies, programmes and priorities for sustainable development. Further consideration should be given to improving its review functions, and national reporting requirements must be streamlined so that all countries, however small, could participate in the process. The Commission's clearinghouse function was essential because of the collective and interactive nature of environment and development problems, which involved a wide range of actors and could not be divided into discrete sub-issues. The Commission had a key role to play in drawing together the strands of special negotiations or subsidiary bodies addressing particular environmental issues.

6. The effects of climate change, sea-level rise and climate variability were of critical concern to the countries of the South Pacific. The entry into force of the Framework Convention on Climate Change was an important first step towards addressing that problem effectively. Nevertheless, New Zealand recognized that the issue was complex and that solving it would be a long-term exercise. It supported practical, flexible and equitable measures to enable the international community collectively to achieve the Convention's objective of stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations at a level which would prevent dangerous human interference with the climate. A meaningful dialogue with transnational corporations whose activities and products had significant implications for the climate must be developed.

7. New Zealand was pleased with the substantial progress made by the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. The decision to work towards a legally binding agreement was welcome. The Conference was important to all States of the South Pacific region, as well as

to other developing States in whose economies fisheries played an important part. All such States must be enabled to participate in its work. New Zealand had contributed more than NZ 200,000 to Member States for that purpose.

8. Large-scale pelagic drift-net fishing had ceased on the high seas of the South Pacific as a result of the strong and united action by South Pacific countries and the cooperation of distant water fishing countries in the region. New Zealand appreciated the significant measures taken by Japan and the Republic of Korea, in particular. Regrettably, however, there had been reports of drift-net fishing in the Mediterranean, the Bay of Biscay and the North East Atlantic. International pressure must, therefore, be maintained and the Secretary-General must continue to report annually to the General Assembly on the implementation of resolution 46/215.

9. Mr. LONDOÑO (Colombia) said that the implementation of Agenda 21 had been impeded by a number of obstacles and uncertainties associated in particular with the failure of the industrialized countries to meet their commitments. Despite important sectoral advances, such as the signing of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the restructuring of the Global Environment Facility and the activation of the Commission on Sustainable Development the picture was marred by the restrictions imposed by the developed countries on the requisite flows of finance and technology and the insufficient funds made available to the Global Environment Facility. The gap in technological development was widening. The tendency to allow market forces to determine technology transfer was at odds with the principles of solidarity and cooperation agreed in Rio de Janeiro.

10. The global decline in official development assistance (ODA) also cast doubts on the political will of the industrialized countries to fulfil their promises. There had been a systematic attempt to divert attention to the domestic policies of developing countries and the mobilization of their scarce resources for the achievement of the goals of sustainable development. Domestic reform was not sufficient. Access to the markets of the industrialized countries was essential to generate the resources that developing countries needed to address the problems of environmental degradation. The attempts to raise new barriers, such as those ostensibly designed to promote environmental goals but actually motivated by protectionist aims, were therefore deplorable.

11. Colombia advocated stronger links between the themes of population and sustainable development. The Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development formed an important complement to Agenda 21.

12. Mr. ALBIN (Mexico) said that the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development had set in motion a process of promotion and monitoring of the implementation of the agreements and commitments entered into at the Rio Conference, especially those embodied in Agenda 21. The Commission's role should be consolidated and its action based on the criteria of transparency, functionality and substance. Specific recommendations should be made on sectoral and intersectoral aspects of Agenda 21.

13. The Government of Mexico viewed as a positive step the decision to link the solution of problems relating to technology transfer and the provision of financial resources to specific sectoral themes. It also welcomed the launching of the second phase of the Global Environment Facility and expressed the hope that the question of whether or not it should continue as the funding mechanism of those conventions would soon be settled.

14. The Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States had come up with the innovative concept of an "association for sustainable development" among those States, which would depend for its success on the support of the international community. Mexico was prepared to join in the effort to implement the Barbados Programme of Action.

15. The recently signed United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification was of enormous significance, for drought and desertification affected the daily lives and even the prospects for survival of millions of people. While recognizing the need to give priority to Africa's problems, the Government of Mexico stressed that the Convention was universal in scope and should also mobilize international cooperation on behalf of the other continents.

16. At recent consultations in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on the preparation of a code of conduct for responsible fishing, Mexico had listened with concern to arguments that negotiations in the context of the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks should take precedence over all other negotiation exercises. The Government of Mexico was convinced that the processes under way for preparing the code and an instrument on high seas fisheries were complementary.

17. Mr. RAICHEV (Bulgaria), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

18. Mr. ABDELLAH (Tunisia) said that protection of the environment was considered a national priority in Tunisia. Achieving sustainable development was one of the major challenges facing Tunisia, and the Government would work together with all components of society and non-governmental organizations to deal with the challenge.

19. The Tunisian approach was to elaborate a sustainable development strategy that would ensure ecological balance, self-sufficiency in food, sound management of natural resources, especially water, and desertification control. His country welcomed the signing of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification but warned that the scale of the technological and financial resources required for its implementation called for an effective and dynamic world partnership.

20. Tunisia would shortly be hosting a conference on sustainable development in the Mediterranean region. The purpose of the conference was to promote the regeneration of the ecosystems of the Mediterranean, which were under severe threat from a variety of sources. It was hoped to adapt the Mediterranean Action Plan to take account of the new sustainable development approach.

21. In view of the increasing interdependence of nations in the quest for sustainable development, President Ben Ali of Tunisia had recently made a number of practical suggestions aimed at promoting North-South solidarity, in particular an appeal for the recycling of debt in the form of environmental and development projects.

22. Mr. GAZMURI (Chile) said that despite the tremendous progress made in terms of the entry into force of the two Conventions signed at Rio and the signing of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, implementation of environmental instruments in developing countries was impeded by the insufficient transfer of financial resources and technology. The industrialized countries' failure to provide new and additional resources for the implementation of Agenda 21 was seriously compromising the results of the Earth Summit. The restructuring of the Global Environment Facility was a step in the right direction but it was insufficient.

23. Referring to the transfer of environmentally sound technology, he said that the industrialized countries and development agencies must replace conditionality by more demand-driven technological cooperation. Otherwise, the assistance they provided would become just another commercial transaction. In view of the inadequate transfer of technology, the North-South and South-South exchange of experiences were particularly valuable.

24. The private sector and non-governmental organizations must join in the efforts to achieve sustainable development. Indeed, they had made an important contribution to the Rio Conference and to the International Conference on Population and Development and had a valuable role to play in building public awareness.

25. At the institutional level, the Commission on Sustainable Development would be effective only if it functioned as a democratic body on a consensus basis. The implementation of Agenda 21 was the responsibility of the Commission and the subsidiary bodies it established. In that context, his delegation welcomed the work of the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Finance and the establishment of the Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Sectoral Issues. In order to ensure the achievement of concrete results, the high-level political dialogue should be strengthened at the next session of the Commission.

26. In the past year, Chile had taken a number of measures to protect the environment. In March, the Basic Environmental Act entered into force, replacing the sectoral approach of previous environmental legislation by an integral approach. The new Act embodied important principles of the Earth Summit concerning preventive action and environmental impact assessment. It established environmental institutions, starting with a decentralized public service which was represented in all parts of the country. The role of education and citizen participation was stressed in both the new legislation and government policy on the environment. Chile had also ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Parliament was in the process of ratifying the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

27. Mr. KARIM (Bangladesh) expressed support for the statement delivered by the Group of 77. It was disappointing that follow-up of the Earth Summit at the national, regional and international level had consisted of debate rather than concrete action. While national Governments were primarily responsible for implementing Agenda 21 and other environmental instruments the developing countries lacked the financial resources and technology to do so without continued and enhanced international cooperation. In that connection, special attention should be given to the needs and environmental concerns of the least developed countries. The resources of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) fell far short of the \$125 billion in additional aid which the developing countries would require annually, and new and additional resources for their sustainable development had not been forthcoming. Given the decline in official development assistance and the deepening debt crisis it was more necessary than ever to seek new and innovative sources of financing for environment and development activities.

28. It was therefore vital for the developing countries to increase their export earnings and to benefit from trade liberalization, as provided for in the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. Compensatory measures must be taken for those countries, particularly the least developed countries which might be negatively affected in the short term by the provisions of the Uruguay Round agreements. They should continue to receive preferential treatment; they also needed assistance in diversifying their exports. Savings realized by the correction of unsustainable production and consumption patterns in the developed countries should be used to combat extreme poverty in the poorest countries. Priority should be accorded to the transfer of environmentally sound technology and know-how to the developing countries on concessional and preferential terms, with emphasis on national capacity-building measures. Results in that area - which had thus far been insignificant - should be monitored by the inter-sessional working groups.

29. It seemed that not much progress had been achieved in operationalizing the goals and objectives of the Rio Summit. However, the high-level meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development had helped to keep environmental issues alive. His delegation hoped that the Commission's decisions would be implemented urgently.

30. Bangladesh accorded high priority to environmental protection, on which its very survival depended. It had formulated a national environmental policy and established a national committee on environment under the Prime Minister in order to implement Agenda 21. Issues of climate change, global warming and desertification were of particular concern to his country. Although Bangladesh contributed very little to greenhouse gas emissions, it would be exposed to great danger if the sea level rose. It looked forward to serving as a member of the Commission on Sustainable Development, beginning in 1995.

31. Ms. YANG Yanyi (China) noted that in the two years since the holding of the Earth Summit, there had been no change in the factors which impeded the sustainable development of the developing countries. Nor had the commitments made by the developed countries concerning financing and technology transfer

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been fulfilled. The question of environment and trade had become a burning issue, particularly with the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. The establishment of environmental standards in trade, however, should not be used as a pretext for introducing protectionist practices or imposing new trade barriers. The needs of the developing countries must be fully taken into account in the establishment of environmental standards in trade.

32. Her delegation had participated actively in the negotiations leading to the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to which it attached great importance. Practical measures should be taken with a view to fulfilling the goals of the first phase of the Convention. The developing countries should not be made to accept specific restrictive targets through amendments to the Convention or negotiations on new protocols. Such action would prejudice the legal basis of the Convention, expressed in the formula "common but differentiated responsibilities". It would also reopen complicated negotiation processes, thereby hampering the implementation of the Convention. The introduction of amendments or the drafting of protocols to compensate for inadequacies in the Convention should not be undertaken until practical experience and scientific evidence had been acquired during an initial implementation phase.

33. As a responsible fishing State, China had actively participated in the work on a code of conduct for responsible fishing and in the various meetings and consultations of the United Nations Conference on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. Her delegation believed that the work and results of the Conference should be consistent with the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, as requested in General Assembly resolution 47/192. It wished to point out that as yet no decision had been taken on the format of the draft agreement for the implementation of the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982 relating to the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks (A/49/522, Appendix). The draft agreement stressed that developing countries required special assistance in order to participate in the conservation, management and utilization of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. Her delegation also believed that coordinated and integrated conservation and management measures should be adopted throughout an area where the same species of straddling and highly migratory fish stocks were found.

34. Greater flexibility should be given to regional organizations with regard to enforcement on the high seas. The principle of exclusive jurisdiction of flag States should be upheld in the enforcement provisions concerning fishing boats on the high seas. In particular, the boarding, inspection, arrest and detention of fishing boats from another State by enforcement personnel from non-flag States was outside the scope of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. More appropriate enforcement measures were necessary in that regard. Preventive provisions should be formulated with a view to avoiding abuse of rights in enforcement on the high seas.

35. Referring to article 14 of the draft agreement, she said that measures concerning any specific area of the high seas should be consistent with the principles concerning the high seas in general. Her delegation firmly opposed unilateral action on the high seas on the pretext of conserving and managing the straddling and highly migratory fish stocks.

36. Mr. TANASESCU (Romania) said that the experience gained in the two years following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had underscored the need for good vertical coordination between the Secretariat and the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system and between the Secretariat and national bodies responsible for implementing Agenda 21. There was also a need for horizontal coordination. Both types of coordination could also be applied at the government level.

37. The recently established Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development had helped to ensure the coordination of the follow-up activities to the Earth Summit. The organization, conduct and outcome of a number of international conferences and meetings dealing with environmental issues had confirmed that the success of such activities depended largely on the participation of Governments.

38. Over the past two years, Governments had taken steps to implement the commitments they had assumed at the Rio Conference. The entry into force of the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity and the adoption of measures to create the legal and institutional framework for sustainable development at the national level showed how much had been accomplished since 1992. However, owing to economic, social or political difficulties, many Member States had not yet been able to implement the decisions of the Conference. Progress in one country could not compensate for the lack of progress in another. Effective implementation at the global level required balanced results at the national level.

39. The first two sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development had been marked by efforts to find an identity suitable to that structure. There was a need for intense intersessional activity at the expert level, which could serve as a basis for the Commission's decisions. The changing world situation and the accumulation of new experience called for a permanent dialogue that would ensure the adoption of the best possible decisions. Such efforts should involve not only Governments but also intergovernmental organizations involved in intersectoral cooperation, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Governments should provide, on a regular basis, information that would contribute to a better understanding of sustainable development.

40. The Secretary-General's report on an agenda for development (A/48/935) and the discussion held on that subject had stressed a new interpretation of sustainable development which, from the theoretical point of view, went beyond the concept that had been formulated at the Rio Conference. Sustainable development was viewed not only as the result of the interaction of economic growth and the quality of the environment. Sustainable development must, first

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of all, ensure sustainable human development, which required peace, economic growth, environment, social justice and democracy.

41. The Global Environment Facility, which was the mechanism for implementing the activities of Agenda 21 at the global level, had recently begun its long-term operational phase. Romania, which was already participating in three regional projects financed by the Facility, considered that the implementation of regional programmes was based on the existence of transboundary ecosystems whose protection required concerted action on the part of a number of States. Joint activities made it possible to gain a better understanding of the effects of such activities on the environment, the dimension of the problems, and the requirements of future cooperation. The efficient use of resources was more important than the amount of resources available.

42. Cooperation among the three institutions participating in the Global Environment Facility - UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank - could be improved. The scientific expertise offered by UNEP was needed to ensure long-term programme efficiency and a balanced distribution of resources among the various regional or national programmes. The Facility's financing of the incremental costs of projects already begun by the recipient countries should not place any constraints on the allocation of resources. His delegation proposed that the Commission on Sustainable Development should conduct a triennial review of the Facility's activities.

43. Mr. Khan (Chairman) resumed the Chair.

44. Mr. ILLUECA (Panama), speaking on behalf of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, said that, over the past few years, the Central American Governments had joined efforts to establish a number of regional environmental coordination mechanisms. The most recent Central American effort in the field of environment and development had been the Central American Environmental Summit for Sustainable Development, held in Managua, Nicaragua, on 12 and 13 October 1994. The Summit had concluded with the signing of the Alliance for Sustainable Development. Costa Rica, Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama had agreed that the concept of sustainable development would increasingly serve as the basis for plans and programmes of action to strengthen and improve natural resources management. To that end, Central America was making its best effort to implement the guidelines established at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

45. The establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development had been a major step in the adoption of international institutional arrangements in pursuance of the Earth Summit. However, not one Central American State was as yet a member of the Commission.

46. The Central American Governments had agreed that environmental policies should solve problems of national importance while taking account of their regional and international implications. In order to encourage action at the local level, the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development provided that, for the most part, the vital functions of sustainable development would be

carried out by existing bodies and offices at both the municipal and national levels. Only the coordination of regional efforts would require the creation of special centres and offices. For the financing of its programmes and projects, the Alliance had agreed to establish the Central American Environment Fund, which would be managed by an independent trust. Central America wished to cooperate closely with the international community and required its assistance in order to give priority to environmentally sound development.

47. The Central American countries had participated in the recent restructuring of the Global Environment Facility. They considered that an increase in financial commitments to the Facility was essential.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.